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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PINS](#) [PINT](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [IZ](#) [MARR](#)
SUBJECT: NINEWA: LOCAL CHRISTIAN OFFICIALS CLAIM INTERNALLY DISPLACED
PERSONS GROWING IN NUMBER

REF: A) MOSUL 48; B) 2005 MOSUL 149

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CLASSIFIED BY: Cameron Munter, PRT Leader, Provincial
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REASON: 1.4 (a), (b), (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Local religious and political officials report that the number of internally displaced Christians fleeing Baghdad and Mosul to eastern Ninewa is growing. Father Aimen of St. George's Catholic Church in Bartallah claims around 3,000 displaced persons are already residing in Al Hamdiniya District, with many more expected as the Iraqi school year ends on June 8. Aimen says the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has been providing monetary assistance to the displaced through local churches. Plans to construct housing for Christian IDPs in Bartallah are almost complete, he says, but potential builders are seeking additional funding from the GOI, USG, and the international community. Aimen believes if something is not done soon to address the situation the number of displaced persons will become a heavy burden on already strained residents of Ninewa's Christian community. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) PRT met with Father Aimen Paulus (known as "Father Aimen"), Rector of St. George's Assyrian Catholic Church and George Kako, parishioner and businessman in Bartallah on May 27.

DISPLACED CHRISTIANS: NUMBER GROWING

¶3. (C) Local religious officials reported the number of internally displaced Christians in the area of Ninewa Plains (eastern Ninewa) was growing (ref a). Father Aimen and George Kako alleged there were approximately 550 Christian IDP families in northern Iraq with more arriving every week. Aimen estimated there was between 2,500 and 3,000 people affected by the displacement as a result of sectarian violence in Baghdad and Mosul. He believed as the Iraqi school year ended the week of June 8 more Christians would seek refuge in Ninewa Plains. Aimen said IDPs reported receiving threat letters advising their departure from Muslim neighborhoods immediately following the

close of the school year. However, Aimen did not have copies of the letters. Aimen claimed that neither the provincial nor central government in Baghdad had engaged on the issue, although he admitted he had not directly petitioned either for help. He believed such requests would be fruitless. Aimen said neither the USG nor UNAMI had helped, even though a UNAMI delegation visited the area recently and spoke to several refugees. Rather, help had only come in the form of monetary donations from the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), and directly from the KRG Minister of Finance Serkese Aghjian, a Christian Kurd. Aimen said he was also disappointed by the media's lack of interest in the issue.

¶4. (C) Zuher Yousef of Beth Nahrain Patriotic Union claimed Christians fleeing Baghdad to Bartallah and Qaraqosh were mostly from the neighborhoods of Dora, Ghadeer, Mahdee, and Baghdad-Jideeda. Edmon Youkhana of Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM) said on a recent visit to Dora neighborhood he personally witnessed the bad living conditions there. He claimed Dora went "dead" after three in the afternoon, with businesses closed and little or no pedestrian traffic. About eight Christians were murdered there daily, he said. In Mosul Christians were fleeing the neighborhoods of Nabi Younis, said Youkhana, and in the past four months about 60 families had left Mosul for Iraqi Kurdistan. He said ADM was conducting a survey on the issue and would provide the PRT with its findings soon. Shimaël Zayya of the Assyrian Patriotic Party said providing shelter to Christian IDPs in Ninewa Plain and Iraqi Kurdistan was becoming a burden. He said the Christian religious community and the KRG were helping provide assistance, such as shelter and donations.

ONE FAMILY'S EXPERIENCE

¶5. (C) PRT spoke to a displaced family from Baghdad that was now living with relatives in Bartallah. Sha'mon Georgis Isaac and his wife Mo'aziz Aziz Naser and their eight children and one seriously ill granddaughter left their home and business in Dora

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after receiving a direct threat from masked gunmen as well as a letter telling them to leave immediately, they said. Over the past 18 months they lost three family members, they claimed, including two sons-in-law. The family of 11 has been residing in two small rooms and relying on the goodwill of friends and neighbors for help. Since Isaac and his family were not from Bartallah they were unable to participate in the food ration system, he said. Aimen claimed the KRG was giving Christian IDPs in Ninewa between 75,000 and 150,000 (50 to 100 USD) Iraqi Dinars monthly. Isaac and Naser, whose house in Baghdad was adjacent to a Sunni mosque, confirmed previous reports of imams advising Muslims not to buy property from Christians but to wait until Christians fled so the property could be obtained for free. Naser said the family at first stayed with friends in another neighborhood in Baghdad for two months before seeking safety in Ninewa on April 14. Naser said the family was too afraid to return to Baghdad and would like to stay in Bartallah if they could find jobs to support themselves.

PROPOSED HOUSING FACILITIES

¶6. (C) Meeting the anticipated needs of future additional IDPs Aimen and Kako prepared a proposal for the construction of a housing complex for 200 to 250 IDP families. Kako and St. George's parish would provide the land for the complexes, he said, but they were hoping for funding from the USG and international NGO community. So far, only the KRG had offered initial support to get the project moving. The housing would only be for Christian IDPs, according to Aimen, even though large numbers of Shabek Shia IDPs were coming to Ninewa from Mosul as well. Kako and Aimen believed the Shia community should address the needs of their own people, however, rather than having a unified IDP assistance program for the area, they

said. This was particularly important since Christians and Shia would be unable to live together peacefully in the same compound, claimed Aimen.

COMMENT

17. (C) These accounts of Christian IDPs in Ninewa pale in comparison to recent statistics of Arab IDPs around the country. Yet these accounts are troubling. That the KRG, through MOF Aghjian, is providing monetary support to the families and has plans to partially fund any housing tenements for Christian IDPs can be read from many angles: altruistically, it certainly indicates the goodwill of the KRG towards its minority neighbors. Unfortunately, KRG aid, especially from a disputed official such as Aghjian who has been accused by ADM and other political groups of "buying off" Christian religious officials in Ninewa (ref b), might raise flags of potential Kurdish encroachment in minority villages. Kako, a leading businessman who has done well on contracts from Coalition Forces and the USG, has his proposal completed and is ready to construct housing for the IDPs on his property. His willingness to do so is as much a reflection of his general thoughtfulness for the displaced (he has been recognized as being extraordinarily generous to charities in Ninewa Plains), or as a potential profiteer of an unfortunate series of events. Whatever the motives of Kako, or the KRG, the fact remains: Christians in eastern Ninewa are beginning to feel the impact of violence to the south.

MUNTER